

A yellow jumpsuit with various phrases printed on it, including "I CAN SELF", "ON EARTH, THE MOON, MARS AND AT HOME", "INSECT ATTRACTANT", "INCALCULABLE SENSUAL UNKNOWN DISCREPANCY", "RIGHT PATH", "GOOD PATH", "LEFT PATH", "BAD PATH", "OUR PATH", "NOT OUR PATH", "MY PATH", "THEIR PATH", "BUT IS HERE", "TOUCH", and "NOBODY FEELS ME".

PERFORMS
AN ALGOFICTION

Alternative Explorer
Performs an Algofiction

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2020-2021

This dissertation consists of two main parts: the present text, 'Alternative Explorer Performs an Algofiction', and the film 'I Round My Lips to Tell You That O is Ø'. In the investigation, performance is situated as philosophical and political act, to expose an analytical journey –to critique techno-hierarchy and cognitive occupation– and an experimental journey –to explore techno-diversity and cognitive liberation.

The research yields methodical and aesthetic approaches and ideas that have affected the investigation as a whole, highlighting experience as a canal for building knowledge. The practice is an algofiction created and performed by Alternative Explorer, presented in the form of a video poem and then imprinted in a suit.

By creating and performing a poem, Alternative Explorer –an embodiment of Pegman, the yellow-to-orange little human icon that, by dragging and dropping it, indicates the exact point the user wants to explore on Google Street View– questions aspects of abstraction, simplification and acceleration related to the techno-hierarchical mechanisms of Google mapping systems that affect its users.

The practice and its analysis unlocks a conscious and active emancipation, one that conceives a critical alternative micro-history of contemporary macro-cartography.

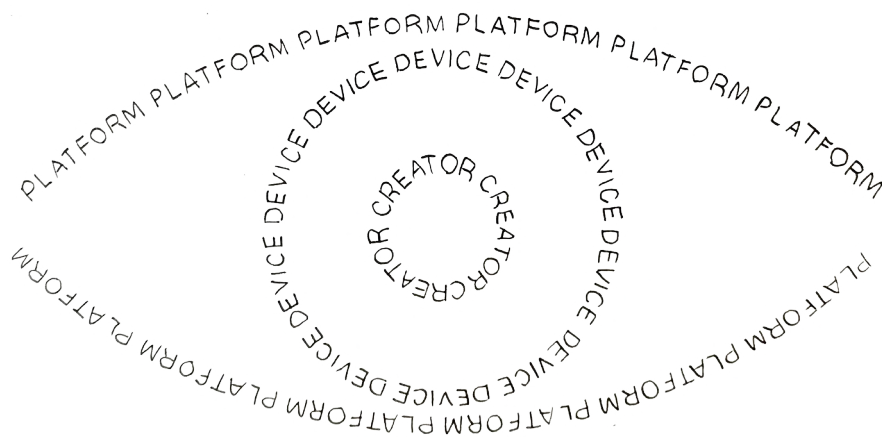
The current visual regime is oppressing our cognitive system through cybernetic over-saturation –it is colonising our representational capacity–, leaving no space for it to imagine alternatives. Maps have been tools of territorial, economical and cultural colonisation. Google mapping systems – Maps, Earth and Street View– are, in addition, tools of cognitive occupation. These designed tools establish a global techno-hierarchy to accelerate the reach of Silicon Valley's singularity.

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Many public opinion leaders have proclaimed during the pandemic that the future is cancelled, although the expression has been flagged several times during the last decade by thinkers Mark Fisher, Franco Berardi, Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek, among others. With these short references I want to highlight the fact that it is impossible to cancel the future. Hence, I want to stress: if we consider it is possible, then, who cancels the future? And the future of who or what?

From a metaphysical point of view, matter was, is and will be. It is the accelerated infosphere what blocks our capacity to act now, in the present, to think and built alternative futures to the catastrophic one scientists, biologists, sociologists and maybe economists are predicting. Franco Berardi (2018) states that “when the acceleration of cyberspace breaks the rhythm of mental time, and we no longer know what is relevant and what is irrelevant in our surrounding environment, this is what we call “chaos”: the inability to attribute meaning to the flow, the breakdown of our framework of relevance. A special vibration of the soul spreads out at this point, which we call “panic”: the subjective recording of chaos.”

Therefore, it is the accelerated infosphere who is cancelling something: the present –human, and non-human. Silicon Valley’s G.A.F.A.M. –in these project specifically Google–, is one of the agents that over-saturates and accelerates our infosphere, occupying our cognitive systems.



Eye Diagram

This diagram illustrates the power relationships in between the user’s point of view and the content displayed in a digital platform. The three elements are always active, like the human eye, although the eyelid is the only one that open and closes, allowing and denying direct visual contact.

Oftentimes there is value in being big because then you can do bigger things.

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The future of Google Maps is one in which algorithms are drawing buildings, AR is helping you decide what to eat, and Google Maps technology exists more broadly outside of the actual Google Maps app.

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Google Maps becomes more than just always being a destination. It's about getting the right experience, and I think it needs to get more intuitive, more natural.

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Overall, I think computing should work in a way where it's much more intuitive to the way people live and not the other way around. AR and Maps is really in the sweet spot of that, because as humans we're walking around the world, perceiving a lot, trying to understand a lot.

The current visual regime is oppressing our cognitive system through cybernetic over-saturation –it is colonising our representational capacity–, leaving no space for it to imagine alternatives. Maps have been tools of territorial, economical and cultural colonisation. Google mapping systems – Maps, Earth and Street View– are, in addition, tools of cognitive occupation. These designed tools establish a global techno-hierarchy to accelerate the reach of Silicon Valley’s singularity.

Google Maps is intended to represent the whole Earth. There are, today, just a few countries misrepresented with “limitations”. It occurred, in some of these countries, that locals uploaded unofficial content to the platform, that has been later on accepted as official content by Google. This user generated content has been critiqued because its quality is inferior, not professional, not polished (Han 2015). Perfect hyper-realism is claimed by GeoGuessr players. Over the past few months, driven perhaps by an increase in travel nostalgia during the pandemic, the online trivia game has exploded in popularity. GeoGuessr is built entirely off of Google Maps data and works by dropping players in a random location on Street View mode; they then race to guess where they are in the world. The poor images (Steyerl 2013) uploaded by local amateurs of these unregistered countries –mostly in Africa– contain insufficient detail for participants to be able to identify glints and guess precise locations.

Google is cartographying the whole planet, leaving no mystery, no unknown. Catalan cartographers are also trying to create an exact map of the Earth in this short tale written by Jorge Luis Borges:

“On exactitude in science

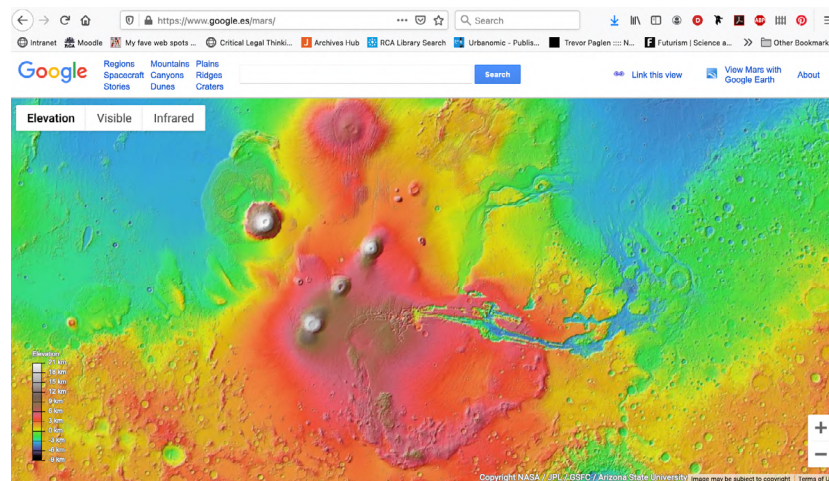
....In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters. In the Deserts of the West, still today, there are Tattered Ruins of that Map, inhabited by Animals and Beggars; in all the Land there is no other Relic of the Disciplines of Geography.

Suarez Miranda, Viajes de varones prudentes, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lerida, 1658.”

In reference to this tale, Baudrillard (1998) states that the territory no longer precedes the map, it is the opposite, the map precedes the territory. The map,

or the simulation of the territory, is more important than the territory itself. In contemporary mapping representational systems, when users engage with spaces, they engage only with its simulation and the real eventually loses all distinction. Maps are, for Baudrillard, a colonising force on the culture's weakening sense of the 'real' world. This condition has been stressed in the virtual environment, one that blurs the line in between reality and fiction –or simulacrum. For instance, Google Earth VR is bringing the whole wide world to virtual reality, to 'help the world see the world and even soar into space' (Google 2016).

Not only the Earth, the planet we inhabit at the moment, is being represented –or hyper-represented. These mapping systems are already offering to users the possibility of navigating through the Moon and even Mars.



Screenshot of Google Mars.

Techno-hierarchy

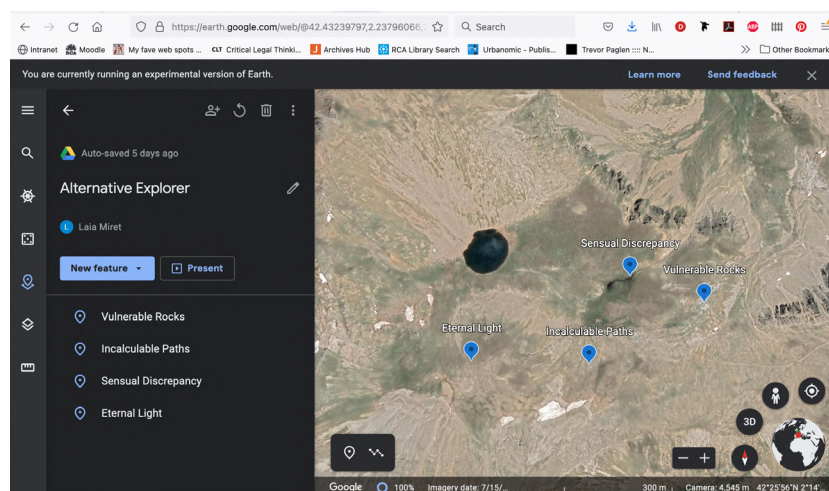
Yuk Hui (2021) argues that only with different imaginations of technology and different practices we are able to escape the convergence towards the end point, towards the apocalypses, to reopen the question of technology and therefore the question of history. For this research, techno-hierarchy is observed as a characteristic of macro-cartography that can be readdressed with the introduction and consideration of techno-diversity, a concept coined by this philosopher and author.

Today we are told that technology is universal. Alphabet's mission –Google's company– is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful (Alphabet 2021). There is a universal rationality in technology, which

claims to be objective. So we only follow this trajectory without being able to deviate from it. Instead of imagining a single history, a single universal history of technology, we must reconstruct different histories of technology and reflect on the possibility of these histories. Only by doing so we can be able to reopen the question of technology and the imagination of technologies (Hui 2020). Google not only organises information, it also organises ways for users to interpret information. The impulse to map is responsive to the accelerated production and organization of data (Hardey and Burrows 2008).

In contraposition to Yuk Hui's term techno-diversity, I use techno-hierarchy to reference the current situation—in this investigation, macro-cartography is situated in a visual regime of image imperialism—, one where there is no diversity, where certain roles decide, manufacture and deliver a digital cultural and economical structure that millions of people, its users, transit every day. By designating a term, techno-hierarchy, I acknowledge the power relationships in between the usability of said structure and the representation of the world imprinted in it, captured and designed by a North American private company.

Technology is a human and humanistic tool, which is being dehumanised at service of capital and, consequently, by using it, it is dehumanising us, its creators. It is urgent to think and design for its re-humanisation by questioning Silicon Valley's designed systems, experimenting with them in order to decolonise the cognitive system to imagine alternative futures to technology. Google is creating



Screenshot of Google Earth with the coordinates of the filming locations for the practice of this project, the video-poem 'I Round My Lips To Tell You That O is Ø'.

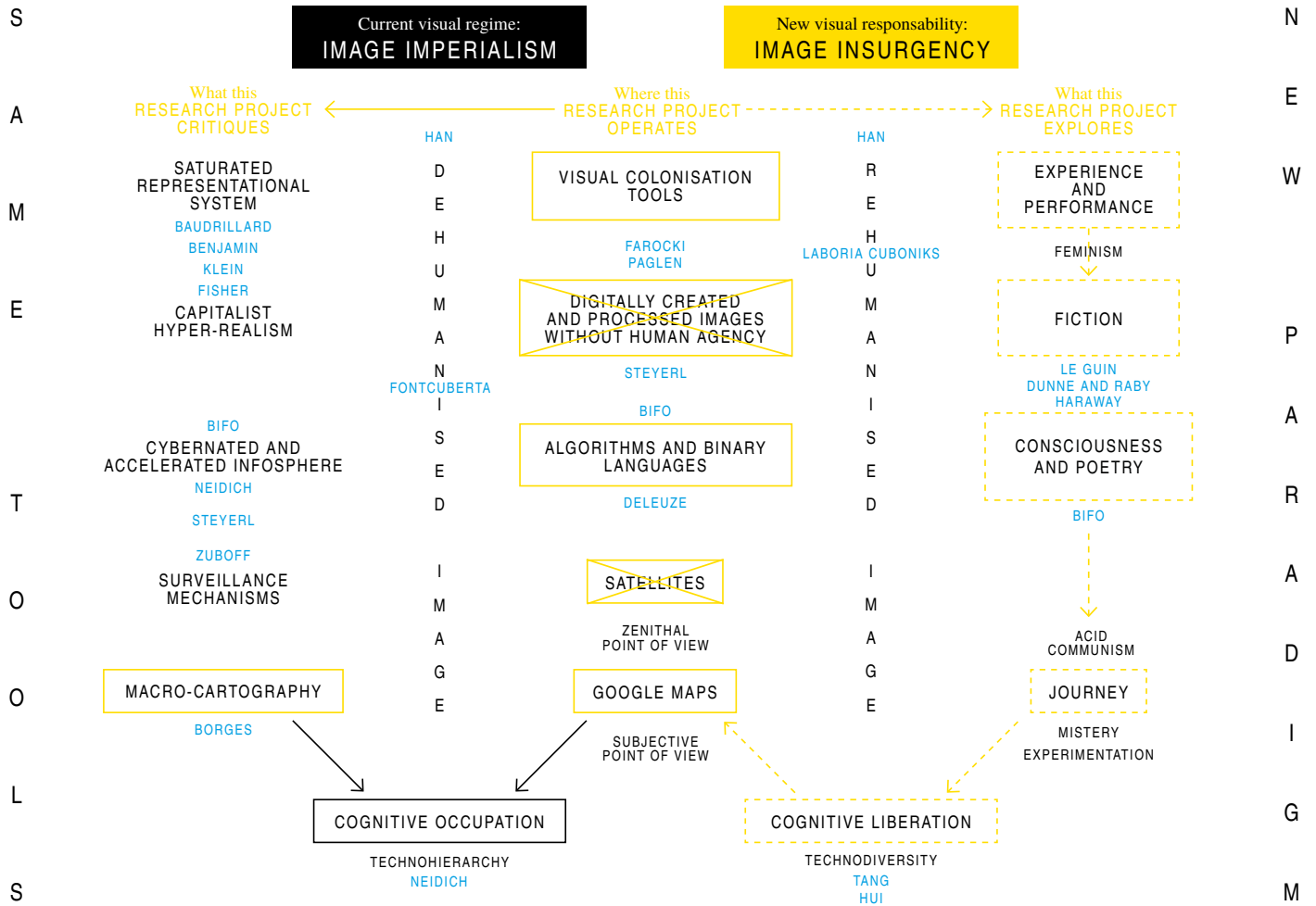
scenarios where we are permanently navigating through the already known. Through visual abstraction, maps have traditionally been used to contain the material world. The map is intractable, predetermined by the network of machines that have composed it. In this –now even tighter– space, we need to form –or reform– meaningful places by reclaiming our agency.

Image Imperialism

Trevor Paglen (2014) refers to Harun Farocki as “one of the first to notice that image-making machines and algorithms were poised to inaugurate a new visual regime. Instead of simply representing things in the world, the machines and their images were starting to “do” things in the world”, thus condemning the human eye to an anachronistic existence, “machines were starting to see for themselves”. This new visual regime inaugurated by image-making machines and algorithms, described by Farocki is the current visual regime we inhabit that I call image imperialism. These machines and their images are already “doing” a lot of things in the world, maybe too many. It’s uncontroversial to suggest that images supplant reality. Joan Fontcuberta (2019) asserts that we are not interested in reality, we are interested in a reality mediated by screens. This mediated content is effectively infinite or, at least, impossible for a single human mind to process.

In addition, the technicalities of mainstream internet devices restrict human senses to sound and vision. Screens are the main feature of said devices and audiovisual communication occupies even more space. Visual information is more accessible for users to consume in crowded or public environments, while sound consuming often implies using other devices for isolation. These attributes –and probably others not specified in this research– technically conformed the current paradigm I refer to as image imperialism. Silicon Valley’s hard power extends its influence through cognitive colonisation.

Fontcuberta (2019) states about the picture of The Blue Marble, the first one of the whole Earth taken by the astronauts from the Apollo 17 in the 70’s, that it contains all the images existing, innumerable images: “we are floating in this kind of cosmos made by images”. This is why we need to redeploy existing global image-making technologies and invent novel cognitive and material tools in the service of diverse and common ends. Almost half of the world population has access to the Internet –48% in 2017–, meaning that 3.7 billion people are connected. 41% of these people are Google Maps users. This is roughly a quarter of the total population.



Initial mind map of the project relating authors and literature, ideas, concepts and methodologies.

If the accelerated infosphere we inhabit is problematic for our cognitive system to process, how can we think about the future from such a complex present? The lockdown gave us a notion to understand that we may need to pause, decelerate, degrow. Dunne and Raby state in their book *Speculative Everything. Design, fiction and social dreaming* (2013) that all design is future oriented and they position design speculation in relation to futurology, speculative cultures –cinema, literature, fine art– and radical social science “concerned with changing reality rather than simply describing it or maintaining it”. But what if we ficcionate the present rather than a preferable, plausible or possible future?

Speculative design practices might be focused in object-oriented design: product design, graphic design, architecture and so on. But what happens when speculative methodologies are set in the area of communication or communication design? If the infosphere is accelerated, therefore communication is also at an accelerated pitch, because it is the pivotal tool to circulate information through stablished mediums. And the mediums are also stressed because their structures are built to be omnipresent in our 24/7 culture. How can be possible to speculate about –or in within– such accelerated, saturated and massively omnipresent and manipulated field that is already hyper-speculative?

In addition, if the present is being cancelled, what if, given the fragmented formality of the information we consume, we situate a fictional practice in the present? Maybe by doing so we can “uncancel” the present(s) and, therefore, the future(s). This practice does not set a speculation on possible futures: it is set in the present, placing the ‘what if’ in environments we are already transiting, acknowledging their ecologies and reusing existing structures of the current system we inhabit. Same tools, maybe new paradigm. Hence, I do question how fiction can unlock diverse technology histories by challenging techno-hierarchical generalisations, classifications and methods of standardisation and communicate a critique of the effects of the dominant culture of Silicon Valley, specifically through an icon of macro-cartography, Pegman.

Algofiction

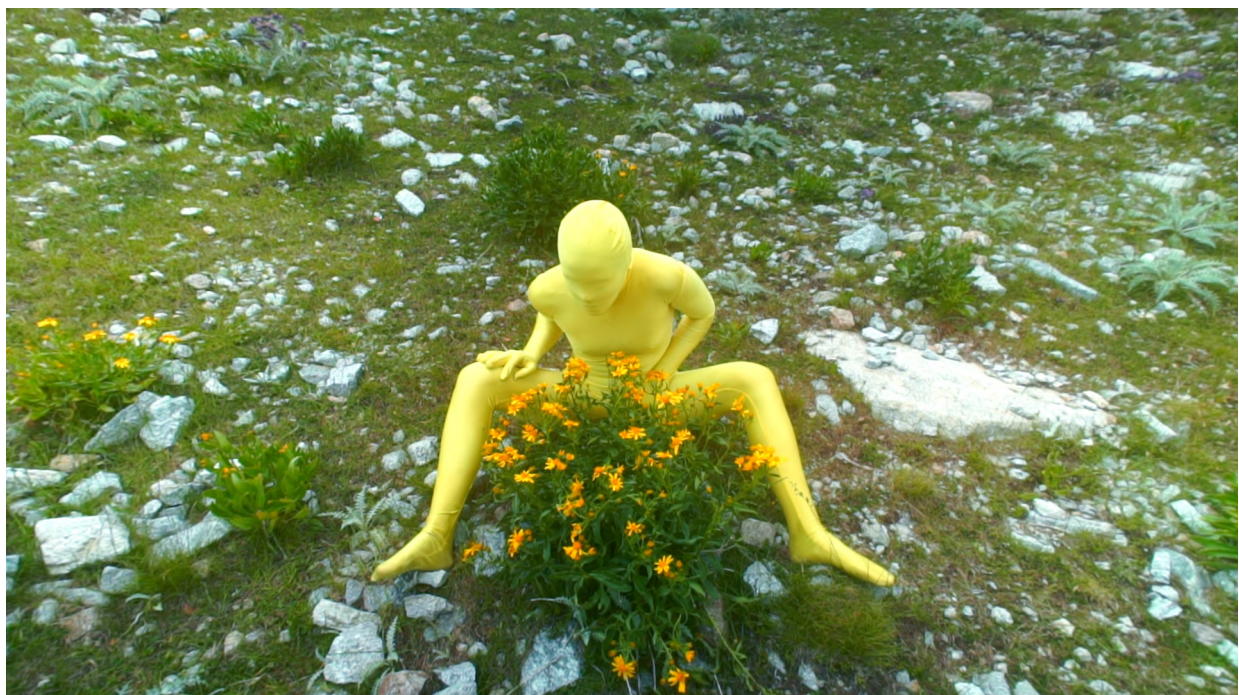
When working in processes where human and machine intelligences interact there is an acceptance of a certain technological emancipation, because we look at ourselves at the mirror. By acknowledging this emancipation maybe we can recognise the other. It is through this dialogue that collaboration arises. A dialogue made up of pixels, 0 and 1, LED’s, chips, clicks, vectors, windows and keyboards.

It is a dialogue that links the human with what makes us human: the experience of consciousness.

Algofiction is an invented genre for this project. These fables occur in-between the digital and the physical, where imagery produced by algorithms is re-contextualised to generate alternative histories of technology. Franco Berardi (2018) suggests that the word algorithm has to do with frigidity and pain: “algorithmic pain results from the constriction of the organism, the stiffening of the vibrational agent of enunciation, and the reduction of the continuum of experience into the discreet logic of computation”. He prefers the Greek etymology for the word *algos*, meaning pain.

Alternative Explorer takes shape in a reality where Pegman, who comes from an algoreality, is embodied by a human that performs an algofiction. In ‘I round my lips to tell you that O is \emptyset ’, the complexity of the physical world makes returning to the simplified virtual world painful. Alternative Explorer is unfrigidising themselves, moving slowly and touching and smelling everything around.

When Pegman becomes Alternative Explorer they become physical, thus alienated from their original binary condition. Alternative Explorer observes the environment and experiments with it. Senses and emotions become tangible and complex, the whole –if not infinite– in-betweenness is accessible.



Arnica, still from the video ‘I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is \emptyset ’.



Is there a path?, still from the video-poem 'I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is Ø'.

Performing fiction as experience to build knowledge

Conducting an investigation of algofiction as political tool as part of artistic research implies that my own artistic practice plays a crucial role; it is in the doing that I explore the potential for algofiction to act politically, but it is also in doing that new thoughts and questions arise because of the interconnectedness of ideas unconsciously conceived and involuntarily suggested while I perform. I use the experiences of Alternative Explorer to think about theoretical approaches and practical methods. Experience is thus a very important part of the research.

In their Xenofeminist manifesto, Laboria Cuboniks (2018) state that “it is imperative that we develop an ideological infrastructure that both supports and facilitates feminist interventions within connective, networked elements of the contemporary world”, meaning that the narratives generated will all consider “redeploying existing technologies and inventing novel cognitive and material tools in the service of common ends”. Whilst Pegman is male and his gender is specified in his name, he is a man, Alternative Explorer is performed by a slightly androgynous female body. My physical attributes are formerly unexaggerated. Although the materiality of lycra could define certain voluminosities, it is deliberate that Alternative Explorer’s sensuality comes from an asexual statement.

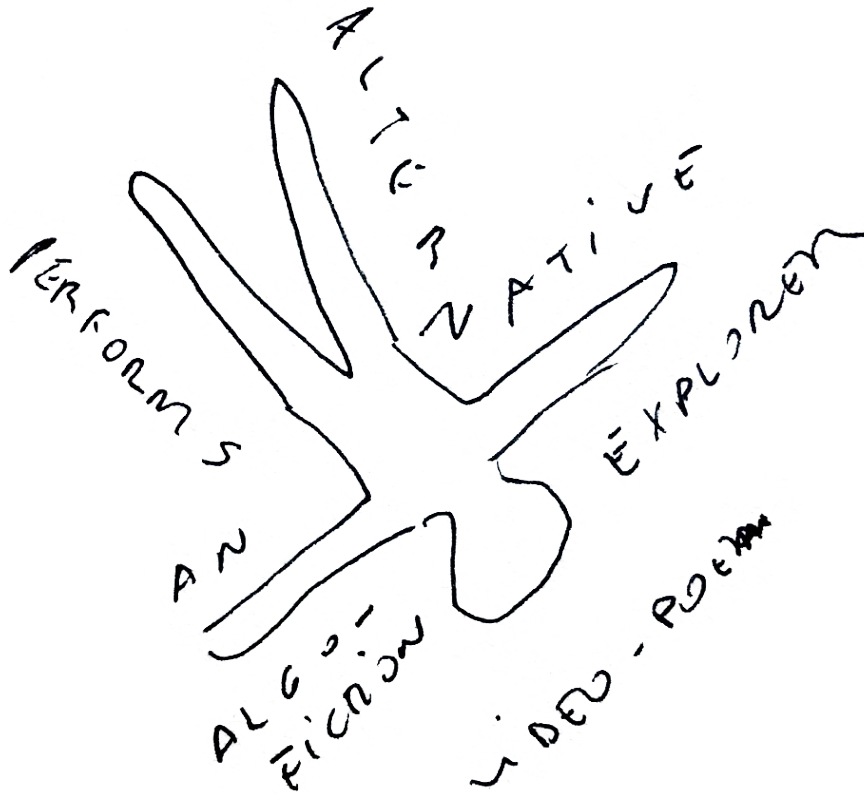
In opposition, in the film, sensuality is humanly experienced through non-human elements: the texture and weight of rocks, freezing river water, the buzz of bees and flies, the smell of flowers in full bloom, the wind, the intensity of direct sunlight. According to Berardi (2018), the idea of A.I. behaving consciously is philosophically false, because consciousness is not behaviour, but self-perception and self-judgement, self-enjoyment and self-loathing.

How can algofiction unlock diverse technology histories and futures? Performative experimentation through active bodies leads to a transformation inside of those who participate, because it creates and re-creates a new relationship between elements, and therefore maybe with our own mirror, technology. It embraces closeness. Productive capitalism is de-futuring our species from our future (The Rodina 2020). These playgrounds experimented through performance embrace collectivist production of past, present and future imaginations. It brings back the agency to the participant.

Performance fictions are produced through declining and affirming what can be imagined. In this sense, performance fictions are different to simulation. Simulation is scrutinised with reality and representation, whereas performance fiction addresses the transformation of an existing state for the actualisation of new paradigms.

Bell Hooks writes in 'Teaching to Transgress. Education as the Practice of Freedom' that when our lived experience of theorising is "fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experience makes more evident is the bond between the two –that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other" (1994). This practice yields a representation, through performance and symbolism, of Yuk Hui's techno-diversity statements.

As a practitioner, I understand techno-diveristy embraces not only technology variety but also plural identities. "Identity politics emerges out of the struggles of oppressed or exploited groups to have standpoint on which to critique dominant structures, a position that gives purpose and meaning to struggle. Critical pedagogies of liberation respond to theses concerns and necessarily embrace experience, confessions and testimony as relevant ways of knowing, as important, vital dimensions of any learning process" (Hooks 1994).



First sketch of the title of the video-poem.

Alternative Explorer

Alternative Explorer is an extension of the imagined user, term used in design processes to determine behavioral characteristics of the individual of a target group. The imagined user is conjured up in the form of anecdotes based on assumptions that can be exclusive and often based in numeric and calculable – but– unreliable data. Alternative Explorer is a figure that comes originally from the digital environment. I invoke this figure and embody it, altering its nature and changing its state from digital to physical. Together we go for an excursion to places that have not yet been registered by Google. The performance is a rite of passage that transforms –or translates– a binary subject with binary experiences into a physical being who feels the complexity of a remote environment.

Google's extensive mapping brings users close to its motivating mission of "making the world's information accessible" and also encompasses the physical appearance of our environment (Gilge 2016). Most of Google Maps and Earth campaigns incite a comfortable, abstract and distanced exploration –'Unleash your inner explorer'–, igniting viewers imagination through the condition of travel in search of new experiences without leaving the house, a condition that has been enhanced since the current pandemic started.

This over usage of the word exploration is what defied the name of the main character of the practice, Alternative Explorer. Whilst explorers have been historically and intrinsically alternative –because they were searching for the unknown, for new territories to colonise–, Google's understanding of the act of 'exploring' lies in another static realm –the viewer's everyday and known spaces. The redundancy then is an obviolation of what the company pretends: that we all can explore the world virtually without the need of experiencing it physically. In the end, what is alternative in the current context is what is out of data, what can not be represented and instrumentalised by Google.

Alternative Explorer is a genderless humanoid presented often sitting as The Thinker –the iconic sculpture by Rodin, used as a symbol of the art of philosophy–, to emphasise that they think, they have conscience. A digital product has developed conscience through a human invocation. This invocation provokes a change of state and materiality and posits a new condition to Pegman.



Alternative Explorer

Discarded art direction for the film, where Google style guides are replicated.

AN ETERNAL LIGHT POLLINATES THE NIGHT
WITH A PERMANENT SUN THAT BLINDS THE UNKNOWN.

ON EARTH, THE MOON, MARS AND AT HOME.

VULNERABLE ROCKS, ERODED TERRAIN DATA.
PILED UP, HEAVY INTIMATE STONES.

ARTHRITIS, HYPERICUM. ARNICA, ANALGESIC. NERVE ENDINGS.
NERVE BEGINNINGS? NOT KNOWING, NOT KNOWING.

REDUCED VISIBILITY, UNPROTECTED FOOT PLANT,
UNRESTRICTED TOUCH, INSECT ATTRACTANT.

SOFT EXCREMENTS, VOLUMINOUS EXCREMENTS,
DRIED EXCREMENTS, MOISTURISING SMELL.

RIGHT PATH, LEFT PATH, GOOD PATH, BAD PATH.
MY PATH, THEIR PATH, OUR PATH, NOT OUR PATH,

IS THERE A PATH?

INCALCULABLE, UNKNOWN, SENSUAL DISCREPANCY.

WHEN

NOBODY CLICKS ME, NOBODY DRAGS ME,
NOBODY DROPS ME. NOBODY FEELS ME.
I TOUCH MYSELF AND NOBODY ASKS,

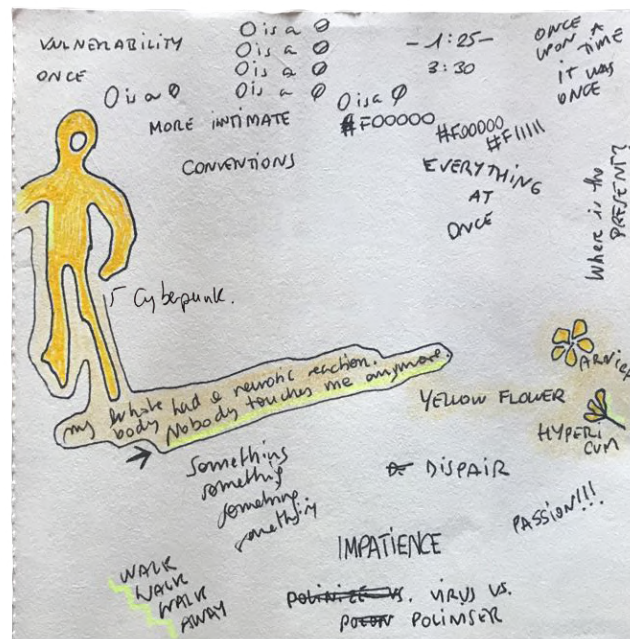
BUT IS THERE A PATH?
TRANSLUCENT, I CAN SEE IT.

ONCE IN DARKNESS, I ROUND MY LIPS
TO TELL YOU THAT O IS Ø.

I ROUND MY LIPS TO TELL YOU THAT 0 IS 0

Pegman is personified and thus can speak to the audience –readers, viewers and listeners. As Alterantive Explorer, they acknowledge their physicality, their design without a face and their attributes. Pegman does not have a mouth. Neither nose, eyes nor ears. Nonetheless, through this invocation, becoming Alternative Explorer, they can think, feel, experience and express.

This shape made with lips is the one we use to say “o” (pronounced /'oʊ/ in English, /ɔ/ in Catalan and /o/ in Spanish). “O” is an onomatopoeia to express surprise –Oh!–, Alternative Explorer is walking around and sensing new things, experiencing the unknown, they are surprised. In addition, “o” is a preposition that in Catalan and Spanish indicates multiple options, excluding each other, therefore provoking an election, that in the binary language is limited to two. This “o” mutates exchangeably to zero as Alternative Explorer fluctuates between the digital and the material: going back and forward, the map and the physical land, Google and the mountains, the river, plants, insects, excrements. Their experience is registered and shared again on Google, therefore translated to binary language again, ones and zeros. When the process of signification is penetrated by connective machines, it undergoes a reformatting and mutates in favor of a reduction to the syntactic logic of the algorithm (Berardi 2018).



Sketch where Alternative Explorer has a mouth and realises for the first time that they can communicate and express themselves.

Poetry as provocation of new signification

“Poetry is the error that leads to the discovery of new continents of meaning, the excess that contains new imaginations in the field of signification and new possibilities” (Berardi 2018). Poetry can be understood as a therapy, as a provider of premonitions of a possible harmony inscribed in the present chaos –a tool to imagine alternatives.

Yuk Hui (2021) states: “The first thing we need to do is to reconsider the distinction between what is calculable and what is incalculable. Then we must learn anew how to approach the world as the Unknown.” The unknown is mysterious and sensual, it can only be worded through poetry, the unreachable eros for artificial intelligence. Reducing the world to data, or 0 and 1, is losing the world: “we must give the non-rational a place in communication through an unconventional and paradoxical use of language”.

If poems are the magic ceremonies of language (Han 2020), how can these magic ceremonies interfere the rigidity of binary language? How can poems be performed to unlock our saturated representational systems and open new significations?

The title of the piece is, partially, a lie. Alternative Explorer does not have mouth, they do not speak. The poem is the only situation where they express themselves.

Embodying in-betweenness

The visual qualities of the design of Google mapping systems produce platforms –Maps, Earth, Street View– that directly affect the user’s relationship to being in the world. Technology layers onto moving through space and reconfigures the perceptual act (Gilge 2015). The spatialised data points are slices of time as the cameras used by Google –placed in cars, satellites, people and drones– move through the landscape. The privileged single view of the original panorama landscape proliferates in all directions in Google Street View. User-generated movement within the interface adds a temporal component back into the image. Independent mobile objects enter and exit the scene with each click. When done in rapid succession, this movement reanimates the environment and renders the static photograph as a cinematic interface. This embodied perspective necessarily implies positionality and occupying a place at a given time.

The embodiment is an attribute of algofiction: it is by placing oneself into



Video still from 'I Round My Lips to Tell You That O is 0'

other's place, in this case an algorithmic environment, that we can navigate the unexplored in-betweenness of binarism, to imagine what is in there and experience an alternative history. In the context facilitated by the conditions of algofiction, the apparent simplicity of the algorithmic environment embedded in binary language (Berardi 2018) can be hacked through experimentation and unlock the representational capacity of the occupied cognitive system. Techno-automation is based on mathematical determinism. A small amount of indeterminacy may lead to disruption.

Two points of view

Google mapping technologies operate through two points of view: aerial –provided by drones and satellites– and subjective –provided by cameras installed on top of cars or as helmets. The film uses the subjective point of view of two subjects in constant dialogue: the cameraperson and Alternative Explorer. The cameraperson functions as a membrane with a technological prosthesis, the camera is an extension of the seeing body (Gilge 2016). They are the receptor and intimate observer framing and capturing the scene, and this subjective intimacy trespasses the locality of the performance when the experience is viewed through a screen device. The viewer is then looking at what Alternative Explorer does, becoming their “other”. Like the map, the photograph is also a complex sociocultural document that does more than simply represent the world. It presents a direct

relationship with the world, giving the photograph its evidentiary force and establishing a certain power relationship.

There are several hierarchical elements in the making: decisions to act the performance –movement, velocity, position, etc.– decisions to film –frame, light, point of view, composition, etc.– and decisions to edit the raw material and process it to deliver a final piece –order, sound, music, titles, etc. Finally, the viewer will add another subjective layer and reconfigure these hierarchies imposed by the creator (Gilge 2016), maybe critically, maybe determinately. Then, the agency of the user of freedom of movement to navigate Google Street View is abolished in this practice, because the navigation is curated by the artist.

I round my lips to tell you that O is 0 starts with a scene filmed by drone. Artist and writer Hito Steyerl (2011) argues that the displacement of the zenith perspective “created a disembodied and remote-controlled gaze.” In other words, a zenith outsourced to machines. From above, the virtual ground “creates a perspective of overview and surveillance for a distanced, superior spectator safely floating up in the air”, highlighting the dynamic between object and subject; “a one-gaze of superiors onto inferiors, a looking down from high to low”. Simulacrum to an omniscient God’s-eye view. Our contemporary visual culture is saturated by views from above, establishing a new visual normality that accepts ubiquitous surveillance technology via entertainment through our screen devices.



Recording site-specific environmental sound.

Environmental sound

The video starts with an aerial view recorded with a drone that sounds aggressive because it is close to the viewer, to emphasise the viewer's point of view. Once the opening scene is over, there is a black screen with the sound of the wind, like in the video Google made to present the new Google Earth (Google Inc. 2017). The rest of the sounds of the video are the environmental sounds recorded on location during the filming. In the video by Google, the treatment is the same, a combination of ambient sound that, presumably, belongs to the landscapes presented. But these sounds are fake; they can not be heard from such a high point of view, neither experienced through their platform. Therefore, the whole sound treatment of the piece 'I round my lips to tell you that O is Ø' is a contraposition, or even a little parody, to the Google one. The visually rich secondary experiences of virtual mapping systems come to inform our navigation and exploration through image recognition, rather than the sensorial rich primary experience of moving through the physical world.

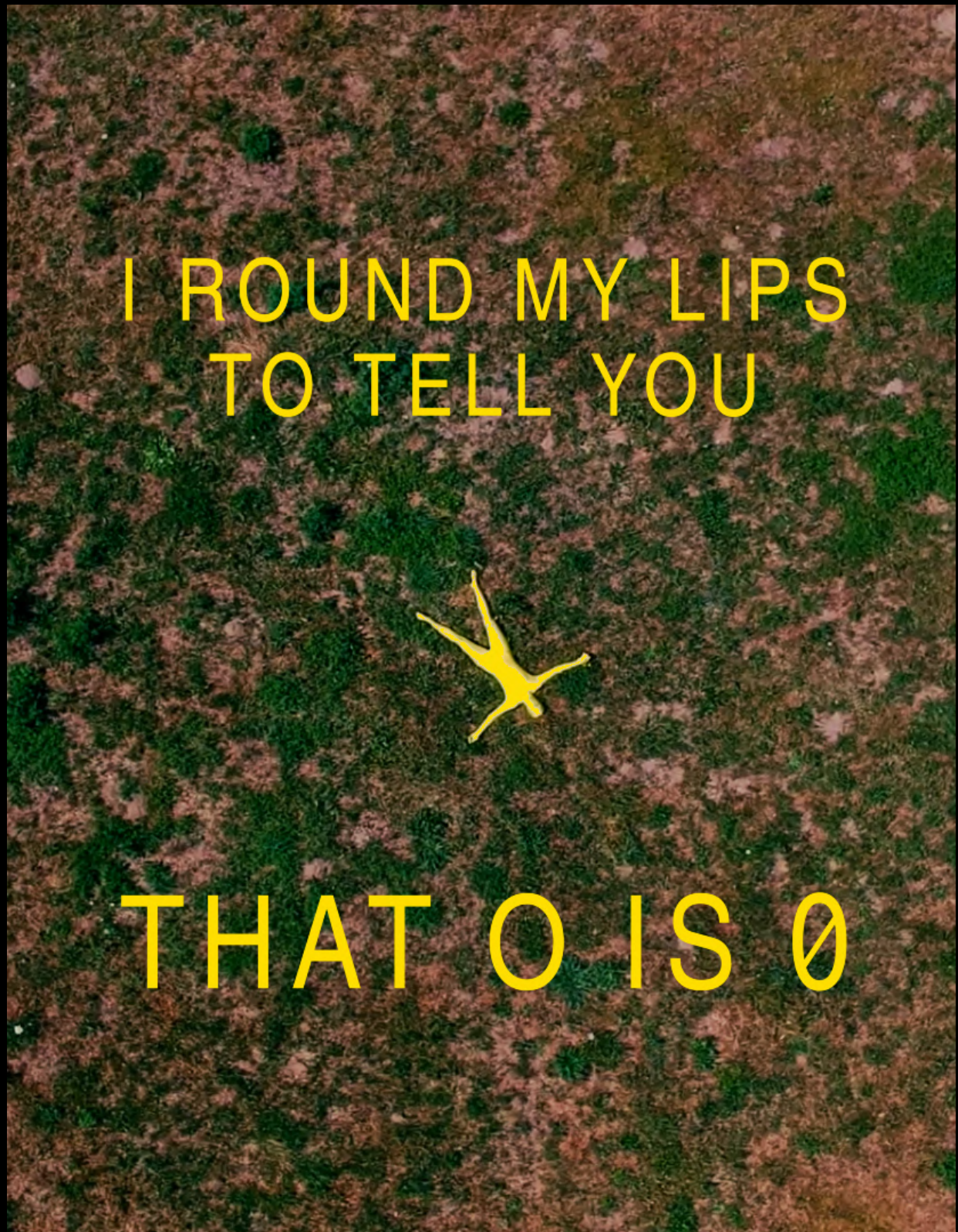
Pollen yellow

Yellow is the main colour of the practice: Alternative Explorer's suit resembles Pegman. It is the simplest colour for plants to use, because flavonoids are pigments that most plants produce already in their leaves. It is also the brightest color to be seen by insects, their principal pollinators.

The term pollen refers to the fertilizing element of flowers. Pollen is the male sperm of a plant, it is a fertilisation agent and an essential element for the survival of many species, as it helps form seeds and fruit. It is composed by fine, powdery spores due to the pigment of carotenoids such as ficarotene, lutein and antheraxatine (Dobson 1988).

At a human level the brain releases more serotonin when a person is surrounded by the colour yellow, which is why this colour stands as a symbol of happiness and positivity. At the same time, it is an attention grabbing colour. In fact, yellow is the most visible colour from distance (Pater 2017).

Metaphorically, Alternative Explorer is a pollinator, an agent that aims to spread inspiration. Many neologisms of the Internet are related to the root "virus" or "flu", roots from concepts such as "pollination", "bloom" or "nutrition" are absent.



Opening title scene, still from the video 'I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is Ø'.

Link to watch the video: <https://vimeo.com/593275958>



Intimate stones, still from the video 'I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is Ø'.



Sensual discrepancy, still from the video 'I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is Ø'.

Link to watch the video: <https://vimeo.com/593275958>

Poem analysis

‘Reduced visibility’, ‘unprotected foot plant’, ‘unrestricted touch’ and ‘insect attractant’ are characteristics experienced when walking in the wild wearing the yellow lycra suit, embodying Pegman of Google Maps. Without shoes, every stone is present. Shapes are painful and also pleasant. Foot plants are bare and delicate, sensitive. Walking requires slowness, a contraposition to the speed of the accelerated infosphere that flows through cybernated Silicon Valley platforms. Touch is not restricted as it is in the digital and virtual environment, where audiovisual senses are predominant. Insects are attracted to bright colors and they fly around and stand on Alternative Explorer. This illustrates a new technology story, one where technology is not detached from nature. On synchronous technological development and ecological disaster, Yuk Hui (2021) argues: “Even if we have common problems we are trying to solve, that doesn’t mean there is a universal solution. There is no single way to respond to the collapse of ecosystems. We must understand that the variation is a consequence of local adaptation. Biodiversity develops because of climatic variation, biological niches, and relations between particular plants, animal, and microorganisms. Something similar should hold for technologies”.

From the hard original materiality of stones to the organic softness of bodily exclusions –excrements. “Excess is excrement”, “excrement retained in the body is poison” (Le Guin 2002). A number of eschatological elements can be found in Catalan traditions, often informed by grotesque pagan elements such as Caga Tió, the pooping log, or Caganer, literally translated as the shitter. Yuk Hui (2021) appreciates the role of local traditions in building diverse technology histories: “...we must develop ways of life that solve the conflict between modern science and tradition, between technology and mysticism...” and excrements illustrate the current state of our communication systems, with a glint of hope: what is unnecessary to live is indispensable to grow.

A reference to Bataille’s ‘Solar Anus’ was specifically mentioned in this section of the poem because I instinctively related it with the obvious physicality of excrements and the apocalypses Yuk Hui (2021) refers to as the ultimate damage of singularity: “If we don’t manage to demonstrate that there are other alternatives, the transhumanist ideology will conquer the whole world”. The anus is the night, darkness. It was erased and, instead, it is represented in the handwritten version of the poem imprinted on the suit. The “o” of the last verse is placed in the lower back area, where the anus is.



WHEN NOBODY
NOBODY DRAGS

VULNERABLE
ROCKS,
ERODED
TERRAIN
DATA

ARNICA, ANALGESIC

ARTHRITIS, HYPERICUM

PILED UP,
HEAVY
INTIMATE
STONES

NERVE
NERVE

ENDINGS,
BEGINNINGS?

ONCE
IN DARKNESS
I ROUND MY LIPS TO
TELL YOU
THAT O IS O.

SOFT EXCREMENTS
LUMINOUS EXCREMENTS

DRIED EXCREMENTS
MOISTURISING
SMELL

Detail of the middle-back area of the suit with handwritten poem.

Arthritis, stiffness and headache are pain symptoms related to sedentary lifestyle and unhealthy body positions due to current design formalities of excessively used screen devices such as personal computers and mobile phones. Arnica and hypericum are medicinal plants that can be found in the Pyrenees, where Alternative Explorer performs. These plants are used nowadays, locally and internationally, domestically and professionally, to soften pain and as anti-inflammatories. Nonetheless, they are part of an extensive and centuries-old oral and written knowledge transferred through generations of witches, farmers and pagans.

Pain ends with death, or live can not be disjointed from suffering (Han 2021). Nerves carry information between the brain and other parts of the body, connecting the senses or sensors to our consciousness. They are the transoceanic Internet cables, the orbits where satellites navigate, although we have not managed to consciously react to the accelerated infosphere carried by these nerves, because maybe we are not able to. Such complex environment does not admit ‘not knowing’ (Forlano 2021) and it is being build to reach a singularity. One for all of us. It might be embarrassing admitting not knowing in an era of hyper-accessible information, yet the entanglement is unrecognisably knotted – ‘Not knowing. Knot knowing’ –. As Franco Berardi (2018) states, “indeterminacy is inherent to the bio-social sphere, while techno-automation is based on mathematical determinism. A small amount of indeterminacy may lead to enormous amounts of disruption. As automated systems are more and more interconnected, disruption tend to spread and proliferate. This is why I suggest that the automated world is simultaneously a space of order and chaos—order in the sphere of connection, and chaos in the interaction of the connected sphere with the pulsating sphere of conjunctive bodies.”

In relation to this discrepancy, Yuk Hui (2021) also states: “The first thing we need to do is to reconsider the distinction between what is calculable and what is incalculable. Then we must learn anew how to approach the world as the Unknown.” The unknown is mysterious and sensual, it can only be worded through poetry, the unreachable eros for artificial intelligence. Reducing the world to data , or 0 and 1, is losing the world: “we must give the non-rational a place in communication through an unconventional and paradoxical use of language”. Incalculable unknown sensual discrepancy.

‘Paths’ are to go to the unknown, the audience of the video piece does not know

where Alternative Explorer is going and taking them. The landscape is idilic, dangerous, ‘piled up heavy stones’ look as if they will fall and kill them. They contemplate anarchic nature and wild environment, walking and trekking these paths that are not reached by Google Maps, unpossessed and unaltered by human, a feeling that resonates with this passage from *The Dispossessed*, by Ursula K. Le Guin (2002):

“What is most changeable is shown to be fullest of eternity, and your relationship to the river, and the river’s relationship to you and to itself, turns out to be more complex and more reassuring than a mere lack of identity. You can go home again, so long as you understand that home is a place where you have never been.”

But it is also said to be intimate, as if these piles of stones and rocks were data. An amount of data accumulated, whose weight and dimensions are acknowledged but not sensed – ‘Vulnerable rocks, eroded terrain data. Piled up, heavy intimate stones’.

During this investigation, it has been crucial to observe that all the hyper-realistic mapping representations of the territory of our planet found in Google Maps, Street View and Earth are presented in daytime. This ‘eternal sun’ and ‘permanent light’ implies a simplification of our perceptive and sensual possibilities, because the unknown, that remains in the dark, is not conceptualised.

Metaphorically, Alternative Explorer is a pollinator, an agent that aims to spread inspiration – ‘pollinates the night’. Many neologisms of the Internet are related to the root “virus” or “flu”, roots from concepts such as “pollination”, “bloom” or “nutrition” are absent.

Maps have implicit authority. Google mapping systems are a macro-cartographic mobile representation where users navigate without interrogating its content, – ‘When nobody clicks me, nobody drags me, nobody drops me. Nobody feels me. I touch myself and nobody asks, but is there a path?’ – because it simplifies spatial knowledge. It contains billions of images fluidly stitched and processed by algorithms that activate the viewer’s consumption through a simulation of production of meaning, hierarchically distributed. On the resulting suit, the order, the edit of the poem is subjugated to the physicality of body emotions and the relationship of certain metaphors to feelings that have a particular association to a part of the body. Therefore, again, the reader will add a subjective layer and reconfigure these hierarchies –imposed, this time, by the body.

Detail of the hand of
the suit with handwritten
poem, 'unrestricted
touch'.





TRANSLUCENT,
I CAN SEE IT

Detail of the upper-front
area of the suit with
handwritten poem.

ON EARTH, THE MOON,
MARS AND AT HOME

NOT KNOWING,
KNOT KNOWING,

INSECT
ATTRACTANT

INCALCULABLE
UNKNOWN
SENSUAL
DISCREPANCY

A quarter of the world's population uses Google Maps services on a daily routine. Policymakers from communication and design industries should be made aware of the implications of macro-cartography. Tech executives are responsible for implementing the commercial goals set by the shareholders of the companies they work for. Growing, expanding, escalating, accelerating. Diversity should enter in order to conceptualize a balanced power relationship in within contemporary global visual architectures, to provide a liberating digital environment of the most popular platforms by the G.A.F.A.M.

The issues raised by this research are analogous to contemporaneous communication design diversity issues. They may well serve as a practical model to conceive and rise political questions in a variety of contexts - professional to educational, artistic to technological. These political questions are concerned by the effects of simplification, acceleration and techno-hierarchy.

Maps have implicit authority. Google mapping systems are a macro-cartographic mobile representation where users navigate without interrogating its content, because it simplifies spatial knowledge. It contains billions of images fluidly stitched and processed by algorithms that activate the viewer's consumption through a simulation of production of meaning, hierarchically distributed.

Photographs operate on how we see the world and we reproduce this previously designed vision in search of experience. As specified in this text, Google mapping imagery acts as a pretext for travel, it surrogates the physical experience without ever leaving a computer screen. The proliferation of images aiming to represent physical experience is accelerating the circulation of virtual experiences, subjugated mainly to vision.

Territory is experiential, and thus subjective. It implies a diversity of sensations and interpretations. During this investigation, it has been crucial to observe that all the hyper-realistic mapping representations of the territory of our planet found in Google Maps, Street View and Earth are presented in daytime. This eternal sun and permanent light implies a simplification of our perceptive and sensual possibilities, because the unknown, complexity, that remains in the dark, is not conceptualised.

When we use Google mapping systems, we experience the world through someone else's abstractions and ordered spaces, whilst the perceiving embodied subject, *Alternative Explorer*, inhabits the world of practices. In this project, it is the experience of performing a poem created in the context of an algofiction what unblocks a conscious and active emancipation, one that conceives a critical alternative micro-history of contemporary macro-cartography.



Permanent light, still from the video 'I Round My Lips To Tell That O Is 0'.

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Images

All images included in this document were created by the author.

Google allows the reproduction of its platforms if maintaining all sources imprinted, as exposed in the screenshots included in this practice. The icons of the interface of the opening of 'I Round My Lips To Tell You That O is 0' have been redesigned in resemblance of Google Earth icons.

Typography

Tex Gyre Heros and Tex Gyre Termes.

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